

## GUIDE TO THE MK2 MARITIME ARABS FILE

[The MK2 Maritime Arabs file contains information on the Arab pearl fishers of the Persian Gulf, and the traders and sailors of the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and southern Arabian peninsula who sail and trade along the east coast of Africa as far south as Zanzibar and to the west coast of India. It does not concern, as a whole, a particular linguistic, political, or ethnic group.

Apparent references to these pearl fisheries occur as early as 2000 B.C. Today, fleets of pearling boats move up and down the Persian Gulf, fleets from different ports each having a recognized territory. During the most prosperous years, at the turn of this century, the fleet was probably close to 3,000 boats employing not more than 40,000 men. By 1946, because of competition from cultured pearls, there were only about 530 boats, but reliable published figures concerning the fleet size do not exist (1: Bowen, pp. 167-169). Pearl diving is seasonal work (four months average) and during the months when the water is too cold (below 85°F), the divers may farm, pick dates, or work as crews on the trading dhows.

The trading dhows are lateen sailed boats, powered for the most part by the regular monsoon trade winds which blow from the northeast from October to March and from the southwest from April to September. These winds have been regular for millennia and blow parallel to the South Arabian and East African coasts. The dhows carry dates, salt, haberdashery, and a variety of contraband and cheap goods that sell in the native markets of the area.

The trade has existed for millenia and shows no signs of failing.

There are four sources in the file; all in English. 1: Bowen is exclusively concerned with the Persian Gulf pearl fisheries and provides a detailed account of the industry from the life of the divers to the sale of the pearls to the Bombay merchants. 2: Villiers is by a sailor who spent over a year sailing with the traders. It covers a variety of aspects of the Arab dhow trade, including the ports of call, the economics and the class system of the seamen. 3: Bowen concerns the two major maritime industries, fishing and pearling, and also contains brief information on rock coral mining. The description of the fishing industry is detailed, including much on equipment and methods. Pearling is discussed in terms of marketing, labor and profits, the techniques having been described in 1: Bowen. 4: Bowen is concerned with the daily life of the dhow sailor.

These four sources provide a picture of an economic system that has existed with only minor changes for probably more than 4,000 years. All four were written between 1948 and 1951 and are based on fieldwork from 1938 to 1947, as well as the historical background. Three are by an engineer and one is by a sailor. While they may lack the observations or analyses of a trained social scientist, they have the value of first-hand accounts. This file should be useful for comparison with other small-scale, yet international, economic systems found throughout island coastal and border areas of the world. The file was processed in 1955.]